

EUROPEAN RESEARCH AREA
COMMITTEE

Strategic Forum for International
S&T Cooperation

Secretariat

ERAC-SFIC 1352/11

NOTE

Subject : Summary conclusions of the 9th meeting of the Strategic Forum for International
S&T Cooperation (SFIC), held in Brussels on 25 February 2011

The meeting was chaired by Mr Volker RIEKE (DE).

The Forum drew the following conclusions:

1. Election of the SFIC Chair 2011-2012

Ms Leena VESTALA (FI) was elected unanimously as the SFIC Chair of for a two year term, starting after the meeting where the election took place.¹

¹ The SFIC mandate of 2 December 2008 by the Council states that: "*It will be chaired by one of its members representing a Member State designated for a period of 2 years*" The SFIC Rules of Procedure provide that "*SFIC shall be chaired by one of its members representing a Member State designated for a period of two years (hereinafter "the Chair"). The Chair shall be designated by a simple majority of the representatives of Members, each Member having one vote.*" At its constitutive meeting of 18 February 2009, SFIC had elected Mr Volker RIEKE as its first Chair, for the period of 2 years.

2. Review of ERA-related groups

The Chair informed SFIC of the outcome of the meeting of ERAC of 23 February 2011 and the future steps in the review of the ERA Groups.² ERAC had agreed to invite comments, by 18 March 2011, from the Chairs of Groups concerned, with a view to the ERAC meeting of 28-29 April 2011.

The Chair invited the delegations, who so wish, to transmit their responses already given to the ERA Groups review to the Secretariat for circulation to all delegations. On that basis:

- a) The Chair, in coordination with the incoming Chair, will draw up his personal response to the request by ERAC.
- b) In addition, the Chair would endeavour to draw up a draft text on this issue which could be attached to the SFIC annual report of activities, if so agreed.

3. SFIC work programme 2011-2012

The Chair of the Task Force ("Priority Setting"), Ms Ana Cristina NEVES (PT) presented a draft contribution for the next SFIC work programme based on discussions at the Task Force.³

During the exchange of views delegations put forward a number of issues to be taken into consideration, including the following:

² The ERA Groups to be reviewed are: SFIC, GPC (Joint Programming), SGHRM (Steering Group on Human Resources and Mobility) and the ERAC Subgroup on Knowledge Transfer.
³ SFIC Work Programme 2009-2010 was adopted on 10 July 2009 (doc. 1356/09).

- enhancing the strategic role of SFIC;
- building up synergies with the Framework Programme and considering contributing towards the international dimension of the next EU Programme for funding of research and innovation, as well as in the context of the envisaged future ERA Framework;
- reinforcing the involvement of EU and Member States' science counsellors in third countries, taking duly into consideration the limited number of counsellors;
- making full use of SFIC to contribute to devising a European strategy for international cooperation;
- reinforcing links to other ERA structures;
- assessing the possible inclusion of the innovation dimension;
- developing criteria for priority setting for SFIC work;
- finding the right balance between continuing the present activities (notably the pilots) and launching new initiatives, possibly with new geographical areas such as Russia, on the basis of the criteria to be developed;
- matching the level of ambition with the resources available.

It was recalled that the SFIC activities should be based on European added value and they are carried out by SFIC members on a voluntary basis which should be duly reflected in the work programme.

The Chair invited the Task Force to develop further the draft work programme, and a thematic work plan to be annexed to it, in the light of the discussion. On the basis of input from the Task Force by mid May 2011, the Chair will draw up a draft work programme, to be transmitted to delegations with a view to its adoption at the next meeting of SFIC on 20 June 2011. Delegations were invited to provide any further written contributions, as soon as possible, to the Task Force.

4. SFIC working methods

The Chair of the Task Force briefed SFIC on the experience gained so far in the work of the Task Force.⁴

In the discussion, delegations in principle supported the continuation of the present approach to the organisation of the SFIC work through the Task Force. The participation in the Task Force should continue to be open-ended and on a voluntary basis, whilst its relationship with SFIC and the overall mandate of the Task Force should be reviewed, so as to best support its possible future role in systematically preparing the orientations of SFIC (the Task Force should, for instance, have the flexibility to develop ad hoc subgroups for specific themes). It was suggested that SFIC decisions should be based on written recommendations or information from the Task Force. The appropriate number of SFIC (plenary) meetings was also discussed in that context, as well as the prospect of organising further informal strategy meetings along the model of the 2010 Villa Vigoni seminar.

The (incoming) Chair will draw up a suggestion for the next meeting regarding SFIC working methods and structures.

5. Green Paper “From Challenges to Opportunities: Towards a Common Strategic Framework for EU Research and Innovation funding”

Mr Isi SARAGOSSI (Director, Commission DG Research and Innovation) gave a presentation on the consultation launched by the Commission⁵, with a view to the preparation of the "Common Strategic Framework", stressing the Commission's wish to receive as much input as possible.

⁴ It is recalled that SFIC, at its meeting of 3 December 2010, extended the mandate of the Task Force "Priority setting" until the adoption of the new SFIC work programme, in which context the organisation of SFIC structures would also be reviewed.

⁵ Commission Green Paper *COM(2011) 48 final* of 9 February 2011.

In the discussion, delegations noted that Member States could contribute individually to the public consultation, whilst a possible subsequent contribution by SFIC could be considered separately, in due course and possibly in cooperation with ERAC, on the international dimension of the envisaged Common Strategic Framework.

6. SFIC Pilot Initiatives: Report from the Task Force

a) "Approaching China"

As the host of the Workshop, the Finnish delegation informed SFIC about the state of preparations of the Workshop on "Member States', Associated Countries' and European Commission strategies and initiatives towards China" (Brussels, 3-4 May 2011), the draft agenda of which had been transmitted to delegations. All interested delegations were invited to propose speakers and/or rapporteurs for the different sessions by 4 March 2011.

b) "India Pilot Initiative"

The Chair of the Task Force (Ms NEVES) and the Commission informed SFIC of their follow-up activities to the Stakeholder Conference (10-12 November 2010, New Delhi), notably as regards the potential for reinforcing the European dimension in cooperation with India. An up-date of the mapping concerning Member States water-related projects as well as mobility schemes between Member States and India will be undertaken.

The proposal was recalled to hold a follow-up conference, possibly back-to-back with an envisaged Ministerial event (EU, Member States, India), during the Danish Presidency in the first half of 2012.

The Chair invited the Task Force to continue developing the activities of the India pilot initiative and present proposals for the next meeting of SFIC and which could contribute to strategic Europe-India research and innovation activities.

c) "Approaching the USA": state-of-play

The Commission informed SFIC of the activities concerned, notably a recent meeting held with a number of European science counsellors in Washington, as well as possible follow-up activities.

Delegations stressed the increased importance of considering more coordinated or joint European cooperation activities vis-à-vis the US, due to a perceived decrease in relative global weight of individual Member States. It was also recalled that links and synergies should be sought with other relevant initiatives such as the Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC) and the European Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET Plan) as well as relevant Joint Programming Initiatives.

The Chair invited the Task Force to continue looking into the identification of priorities for action with the US

7. SFIC's Role in Summits and Bi-regional Dialogues:

- EU-Africa

The Commission informed SFIC on the follow-up to the EU-AU summit of 29-30 November 2010 (Tripoli) which had adopted the Joint Africa EU Strategy Action Plan 2011-2013 (including the 8th Partnership: science, information society and space) and endorsed the establishment of a high-level EU-Africa S&T policy dialogue. The Commission explained that the launching of the dialogue has been delayed to date due to the events in Tunisia (African co-Chair of the 8th Partnership) and in Egypt (current Chair of the African Ministerial Council of Science and Technology - AMCOST). The Commission will inform SFIC as soon as some progress in preparing the first EU-Africa Senior Officials Meeting has been achieved, elaborating, jointly with interested Member States, ways on how to set up in concrete terms this newly established policy dialogue.

- **EU-LAC: state-of-play**

The Commission informed SFIC on progress towards the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) on 28/29 March 2011 which will have the main task of endorsing the draft roadmap for the implementation of the EU-LAC Joint Initiative for Research and Innovation. The Commission, as co-Chair of the SOM, will aim at agreeing a few priorities of common interest to concentrate efforts for developing concrete and significant actions. Member States that have not yet done so were encouraged to nominate their representatives to the SOM.

8. SFIC annual report of activities

The Chair suggested drawing up a draft report by mid March 2011 with a view to its adoption through written procedure by end of May 2011, i.e. prior to the meeting of the Council ("Competitiveness") of 30-31 May 2011.

9. Dates for next meetings

Monday 20 June 2011.
